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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIRKUK 000270

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SUBJECT: (C) WASHINGTON TRIP HELPS BOOST KURDISH SUPPORT FOR STAYING IN IRAQ

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. KRG (Erbil) PM Nechirvan Barzani lauded President Bush for hosting his uncle, KRG President Masud Barzani. PM Barzani said that -- while the U.S. had been careful on protocol -- he felt as if the U.S. had received President Barzani as a head of state. PM Barzani said the visit helped Kurdish elites show that getting rights in a democratic Iraq with U.S. support was better than seeking independence without U.S. (or any neighbors') support. He and KRG (Erbil) Minister of State Falah Mustafa Bakir predicted a higher voter turnout than in October, expected Jalal Talabani to continue "in Baghdad" and Adil 'Abd al Mehdi to become Iraqi PM. The KDP had told sympathetic Assyrians to run their own list, so as to have non-Muslim MPs to blunt any push towards an Islamic state. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

(U) A GREAT TRIP TO WASHINGTON

2. (C) PM Barzani lauded President Bush for hosting his uncle, KRG President Masud Barzani. PM Barzani told the Acting Regional Coordinator RC(A) December 6 that -- while the U.S. had been careful on protocol -- he felt as if his uncle had been received as a head of state. They considered both the protocol and the substance of the visit to be a great success. PM Barzani said the visit helped Kurdish elites show that getting rights in a democratic Iraq with U.S. support was better than seeking independence without U.S. (or any neighbors') support.

3. (C) PM Barzani said he was struck by how President Bush had a vision for Iraq and was committed to accomplishing it. PM Barzani said Kurds took the warm U.S. welcome as appreciation for what the Kurds had done in the past. It also showed that, although the U.S. normally spoke of Iraq as a single entity, Washington saw the Kurds had a rightful place in the new Iraq and considered the Kurds a partner in the coalition. He also praised the meeting with Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez as encouraging and positive.

(U) ELECTION PREDICTIONS

4. (C) PM Barzani and Bakir separately predicted the following results for the National Assembly elections:

- Shia 80-100 (Bakir); 80-110 (PM)
- Kurdish Alliance 60 (Bakir); 45-55 (PM)
- Sunnis 45-50 (Bakir); over 40 (PM)
- Allawi 30-35 (Bakir); 25 (PM)
- Chalabi 5-10 (Bakir)
- Kurdistan Islamic Union 1-2 (Bakir).

5. (C) PM Barzani said the Shia had divided their list as follows:

- 30 seats to SCIRI, but -- unbeknownst to Sadr -- SCIRI would get 2 extra seats from Shadur (as heard), who was only nominally independent;
- 30 seats to Sadr;
- 25 seats to the 2 Da'wa parties; and
- 15 seats to the Faylis.

6. (C) Both PM Barzani and Bakir predicted a higher turnout than in October, when some Kurds opposed the constitution for not allowing independence and others did not bother to vote because they were so sure it would pass. The KDP was now ramping up its public campaign. They said it aimed largely at turning out the vote, since, they claimed, they need not campaign much against other Kurdish parties. PM Barzani lamented the difficulty of getting younger voters to vote. RC(A) stressed the importance of running a fair election and avoiding intimidation against minorities or other Kurdish parties. (Note: This conversation took place before the Dahuk attacks on the KIU, reported septel. End Note.) Bakir said the KDP would welcome international observers.

7. (C) PM Barzani said the KDP had told sympathetic Assyrians to run their own list rather than in the Kurdish Alliance. The KDP wanted non-Muslims in the National Assembly to blunt a Shia push towards an Islamic state. The KDP knew it could form a

coalition with Assyrians after the election.

18. (C) PM Barzani said the KDP would encourage Iyad Allawi to join the government that he was sure would be headed by Adil 'Abd al Mehdi; Iran would create problems were Allawi to become PM. Chalabi would get a post, though not PM. Iran was taking the Iraq elections even more seriously than the U.S.: Iran was paying politicians monthly stipends and saw the vote as a historic opportunity. SCIRI had placed 6,000 supporters in the Ministry of Interior (MOI). The Ba'athists were becoming better organized and financed; he assumed Syria was helping them. The Sunni Arabs were the only group with real experience in running Iraq. If the U.S. left, it would mean civil war.

19. (C) When asked how KRG politics would change if President Talabani lost the Presidency and returned home, Bakir dismissed the possibility. A Kurd had to be President, PM or National Assembly Speaker: Talabani was the Kurds' nominee. Bakir expected the Kurds to become the second largest bloc in the National Assembly, so did not expect any problems in keeping one of the three top posts. He said Kurds had to convince others that Kurds wanted to remain part of a new democratic Iraq, albeit with fair representation.

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